



The 2nd Aruba Piano Festival offered a weekend of remarkable performances

When Armand Simon returned from Holland to the land of his birth three years ago, he established a career a private piano teacher. He was amazed to discover that Aruba had over 200 students eager to learn classical styles of piano, and so established the Aruba Piano Festival last year. "I saw many opportunities here, and a remarkable amount of interest," he reports.

Last year's success laid the groundwork for this year's noteworthy agenda and international coterie of visiting artists. Alan Weiss of the U.S., who now lives and teaches in Belgium and Holland is considered "one of the outstanding pianists of his generation." Randal Corsen, his Alan's colleague at the Music Conservatory in Utrecht, is originally from Curacao, and a jazz pianist of international repute. He appeared as one of the star performers of the Caribbean Sea Jazz Festival in August.

Additionally appearing over the three day festival was violinist Simon Gollo of Venezuela, Horacio Contreras, cellist, who is also from Venezuela, as is flautist Nicaulis Alliey. Famed pianist Gerardo Villa of Argentina completed the roster of visiting artists, not only performing in concert, but also giving clinics along with Alan Weiss and Randal Corsen, who along with Gerardo and two noted Aruban pianists, acted as judges for the final youth competition conducted on Sunday evening at the Cas di Cultura in Oranjestad.

The festival was comprised of recitals by the visiting artists who additionally conducted workshops for the aspiring young piano students registered for the competitions. Workshops were conducted at Aruba's National Library and Access Art Gallery, which was also the venue for a Sunday concert by Armand Simon and Nicaulis Alliey. One of the most exciting aspects of the entire weekend was the final night of competition, where one talented young pianist would win a scholarship to the Festival y Academia del Nuevo Mundo Maracaibo, in Venezuela during August of 2008. Contenders were divided into two age groups, from eight years old to twelve, and from thirteen to seventeen. In the eight to twelve age group were Quincy Connor, (second place winner) Genesis Giel, Noah Vonk, Jelle Teusink, Emile Ponson (second place winner) and Angelique Janssen, gold medal winner and the winner of the popular vote of the audience as best performer. Angelique, only nine years old and a student of noted Aruban pianist Johnny Schaarbay, presented a remarkably polished performance of Mozart's Ronda all Turca and Chopin's Nocturne in C Minor.

Winning first place in the thirteen to seventeen year category with his flawless interpretation of works by Chopin and Prohofieve was Alexander Kraft van Ermel of Curacao, grandson of famed pianist Wim Statius Muller, who was with him in Aruba to share his triumph. Second place went to Eduardo Garcia, last year's scholarship winner, and third place Jeremy Lanooij was judged "most promising young performer" and winner of the scholarship, which was awarded by Clive Harms, President of the Aruba Scholarship Foundation. Additionally performing in their age class was Elisa Partodikromo. The evening and festival ended with a final recital by Randal Corsen.

The Aruba Piano Festival brought together the finest elements of classical and jazz piano, with visiting artists not only sharing their talent with appreciative audience, but also their wisdom and experience with the next generation that wishes to keep alive the great classic works by Bach, Beethoven, Tchaikovsky and others. Seventeen-year-old Alexander Kraft van Ermel commented that it was wonderful for him to find other young people still interested in playing and perpetuating the art of classical piano. Johnny Schaarbay, a graduate of the Berklee School of Music and a judge in last year's festival commented that "the festival offered a once in a lifetime opportunity for Aruba's talented youth to benefit from masters such as Alan Weiss, and it is something they will take with them all their lives."

In the preliminary, participants will each have five (5) minutes to interpret one (1) composition, free of choice. From each category a maximum of six (6) participants will continue to the finals. In the finals, participants will have ten (10) minutes to interpret two (2) compositions, free of choice but with a varied character and/or style period. The composition played in the preliminary may not be repeated in the finals

THE PARTICIPANTS

Mariah Croes (12), Alexander Kraft van Ermel (17), Elisa Partodikromo (14), Jelle Teusink (12), Sylviënne van der Kruk (9), Angelique Janssen (9), Jeremy Lanooij (16), Eduardo Garcia (17), Emile Ponson (12), Noah Vonk (12), Ruth-Yinlu Cheng (9) y Genesis Giel (11).

THE JURY

Randal Corsen (Curaçao), Alan Weiss (USA), Gerardo Vila (Argentina),
Mayra Kock (Aruba), Livio Hermans (Aruba).

PRIZES

Main Prize: Cash Prize - USD 500,-

Special Prize: Scholarship for the Festival y Academia del Nuevo Mundo Maracaibo, Venezuela (August 2008) - This prize will be awarded to the most promising Aruban talent